COMMUNION MEDITATION
PSALM 133
PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

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"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"

What does that mean: Real Brothers? Fraternity Brothers? In the context of the 133rd Psalm, written centuries before Christ, it referred to the "clan", the basic unit of Hebrew culture. The clan closed ranks to celebrate the joyous occassions of life such as birth, to observe the sad occassion such as death; the clan gathered for mutual protection, for the shearing of sheep, for the marrying of the young. And it was good to be together.

And yet, in that phrase from the Psalm there is one of the fondest hopes of the human heart, one of the noblest dreams ever dreamed - the unity and commonality of all men: the universal brotherhood of man, trascending all barriers of nation, race, class or culture, living together in peace and prosperity.

Well, how does it fare with the ideal today? How are we doing in the good and pleasant business of dwelling in unity. Not well, I fear: not very well at all.

A brief hint at what it might be like kept turning up in Munich at the Olympic Games. Something great was affirmed there, something stirring and inspiring. Things couldn't be too bad if beautiful young people could compete head to head in the arena and embrace afterward. But the games of the 20th Olympiad will be remembered, not as the quadrennial affirmation of brotherhood and international cooperation, so much as the setting for ruthlessness and madness and bloodshed. That's how it goes with noble ideals: they come crashing down under the onslaught of political reality.

How about elsewhere? How goes the unity business? In Rhodesia and South Africa apartheid defines unity in terms of "white only". And even as Uganda was urging the expulsion of Rhodesia from the Olympic games, all Asians and Orientals were being banished from Uganda. In Belfast bombs punctuate each sundown, and little children learn to hate the "bloody Papists" or the "rotten protestants".

How about here in the home of the free and the land of the brave? Michael Harrington several years ago said that we were becomeing two nations: one rich - the other poor. The Kerner Commission suggested another dichotomy - : one black - the other white. And this week, Time Magazine held that we are already two nations - badly divided over the

fundamental issues of the day.

Brotherhood and Unity surface occasionally: frequently enough to keep the hope alive. Project Commitment happened in our own community: people did get together to think about the problems of human relations - but not very many of them: and certainly not the people who have the power to make things happen.

We may laugh at Archie Bunker every Saturday night. But I keep running into Archie in ways that are not very funny. In the mind of a frightening number of people terms like nigger, wop, pollack, kike, jap, still provide the methodology for establishing "Who's Who" in the community. If you want a clinical experience that you won't forget,grow a beard, and see what that does to your personal participation in the human family.

And running beneath it all we're lonely. The sociologists call it cultural fragmentation: the psychologists - alienation: the theologians - estrangement. Gerald Jud, a clergyman, put it simply: "People are dying of thirst in the fresh water lake". And not long ago the Beatles put it down in music in a song called Eleanor Rigby which asked: "all the lonely people: where do they come from?

So today - World Communion Sunday - we affirm once again the noble hope of Psalm 133, in the one place in the world where it ought to have real substance. Yet even here - in the Church of Jesus Christ - things are not exactly good and pleasant. In fact, you couldn't take Communion in many of the Churches in our own community at this hour. In many of those congregations the faithful are being told how right they are - and by inference - how wrong we, and the rest of Christendom is. And lest our Presbyterian openness become a source of self-righteousness, let us not forget that we were the ones who abandoned the Consultation or Church Union.

Is it any better personally? Do you feel at one with your fellow Christians - with your immediate neighbors - with your own family? I would hope so. And yet my personal experience leads me to suggest that much of the time there is more celebrating of common humanity - more real fellowship - at the local tavern than there is in the church of Jesus Christ: that we can find more reasons to pick at each other and be petty with each other here than anywhere else.

So today we come to the Lord's table - on World Communion Sunday. "How good and

pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity." And it's just not enough to say those words and engage in a ritual: because reality flies in our face. Something is demanded of us today - as on no other day - if what we do is to be honest and not just a pious charade.

It's a day, I believe, for acknowledging that divisiveness between people begins with me: that it's a special kind of hypocricy to cluck our tongues about the great barriers in our culture while at the same time using those same barriers to insulate our own little world from outside intruders. It's a day, I think to acknowledge that the whole human unity business is essentially a person to person thing: that I may feel a certain sympathy for the poce in South America, but what really matters is my relationship with my neighbor.

In his letter to the early Christian Church at Philippi, St. Paul dealt directly with the whole issue. There were problems in the Philippian church: the usual problems of the Gospel in the hostile environment, persecution, opposition, misunderstanding. But the problem that threatened the life of the church was an agrument, a dispute between people and the resulting jealousy and pettiness. That's always been the case. Persecution Atheism, communism have never been very successful in killing off the church: the fatal foe has always been petty human divisiveness.

So Paul advised them: "do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselver. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

The interesting thing about that advice besides its profound simplicity is the use of the word "humility." In the Greek world - and the Philippians were Greeks - humility was not at all a virtue. Only a coward or a fool would yield anything to his neighbor. And so Paul was here introducing a whole new idea to the early Christians: the idea that humility is a positive virture, a necessary style of life in the church of Jesus Christ.

Now, he wasn't talking about meekness: Paul did not mean humility as the milque-toast self debasement that we have come to identify with the word. To the contrary, for Paul, humility meant strength reigned in and commited to the service of others. That is to say, there is no possibility of a man being humble if he has no reason to be proud. Humility, here, is a gift, an act of intention: a directing of my personhood outward to meet the

personhood of another man. Humility here is simple honesty: the honest recognition of another man's dignity and worth, and an attempt on my part to take seriously his needs and wants and hurts.

In terms of our nation, this kind of humility would lead us to see that while we are strongest - we are only one nation: that if the entire human family were represented in a community of 100, six would be Americans. It might result in an honest recognition of the fact that much of the family is suffering: that we six have a life expectancy of more than seventy years, while all the rest average out to thirty nine. It might result in the acknowledgement that while we six have fifteen times the amount of food we need, two thirds of all the rest go to bed hungry every night. Humility - which means strength under control - might one day lead us to spend a million dollars a day to help our brothers rather than bombing them into oblivion.

And on the personal level humility might motivate you to take your neighbor seriously: to minister to him by trying to see how he sees things, by entering into his world for a while and feeling his joy and his pain.

Did you ever think about how little we do that? How reluctant we are to share our happiness and our hurt with each other? Because we've learned that even as we begin to tell about something - the person to whom we are talking is constructing his response which will be better or worse than ours.

It's a simple thing, really. It's a gift we can give to each other - and it's based on the fact that each of us has much to give. I am a unique person - and so are you. There is no one quite like me and no one quite like you. And we can minister to each other by commiting our uniqueness - our strength to each other: by saying - in word and deed - "you matter to me - I am for you - I will share whatever you want to share with me."

And it ought to be happening here all the time. It does happen: not frequently enough, but it happens. And when it does, it is a healing and saving experience. Many of you have ministered to me - and shared my joys and pains. And I've seen you do it with each other.

And, you know, when all is said and done, that's what we have to offer the world: a way of being that grants everyman his dignity: a way of being that is open and sharing

and loving: a model of how life was intended to be lived. The world needs to see that: the world needs to know that there is another way: that it is good and pleasant - and possible - for brothers to dwell in unity.

Paul called the Philippians to imitate Christ: Jesus Christ who, though God's son, emptied himself and became a servant. We come to his table today - the one who emptied himself for us: we come with brothers and sisters of all colors and races and nations: and we come - most importantly with each other. As we break bread together this morning - let us give thanks for each other: let us affirm the possibility of brothers dwelling in unity. Let us experience - in the presence of Jesus Christ - just how good and pleasant it is. AMEN

Our father, we would climb over the walls that separate us. Help us to be honest and open with each other. Bless our brothers and sisters all over the world at this hour. And renew within all of us that ancient dream of brothers dwelling in unity. Through Jesus Christ our Lord - who emptied himself for us. AMEN